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AIRFARES SET TO DROP AS MARKET LEADER INDIGO CUTS FUEL CHARGE

IndiGo on Thursday announced the withdrawal of fuel charge that will reduce airfares by up to ₹1,000 on certain long routes as ATF prices fell

FALL IN ATF COST LEADS TO SLASH IN FUEL CESS

As Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices are dynamic, IndiGo will continue to adjust its fares and components to respond to any change in market conditions, the airline said in a statement. Fuel cost accounts for a significant chunk of a carrier's operational costs. In October 2023, IndiGo levied fuel charge up to ₹1,000 to offset the spike in ATF prices | P13

ATF PRICES FELL FOR THIRD TIME IN 2 MONTHS

- Government cut ATF prices for the third time on January 1. Earlier price cuts were in November and December
- Despite ATF price cuts, airlines were not passing on the benefit to passengers, which raised concerns in various quarters. Aviation minister Scindia nudged airlines to keep passengers' interest in mind

₹1,06,042.99

PER KL IS THE PRICE OF AVIATION TURBINE FUEL IN CHENNAI AS ON JAN 1

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Amid spat with allies, Cong to begin seat talks

War of words between TMC and Congress over seats in West Bengal for Lok Sabha polls

PREETHA NAIR @New Delhi

AMID growing rumblings among INDIA bloc partners in various states over seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress on Thursday said it will begin talks with its allies soon.

The development came hours after the Congress and Trinamool got into an ugly spat over seats in West Bengal. Earlier in the day, state Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury hit out at TMC chief Mamata Banerjee for offering just two of the state's 42 seats to the grand old party. A furious Chowdhury said his party doesn't need Banerjee's alms and can win more seats on its own. In response, the TMC said 'bad mouthing alliance partners and seat-sharing can't go hand-in-hand.'

In Punjab also, the Congress and AAP leaders have been issuing statements against each other over the ED's summoning of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal.

Later in the evening, the Congress' National Alliance Committee (NAC), which was set up to facilitate seat-sharing agreements with INDIA partners, met party president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi, and submitted a detailed report outlining potential state-wise alliances.

NEW NAME FOR RAHUL'S YATRA

The Congress on Thursday renamed Rahul Gandhi's East to West yatra as Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which will be flagged off from Manipur on January 14. Earlier, the yatra was called Bharat Nyay Yatra. The party will invite all members of INDIA bloc to join the yatra along its route

Speaking to the media, NAC head Mukul Wasnik said state-level talks with allies will start soon. Other members of the panel include former Union minister Salman Khurshid, former CMs Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel, and senior leader Mohan Prakash.

"We have submitted our report to Congress leadership based on the feedback from state unions on the feasibility and prospects of forming alliances with various parties in different states. Now, discussions with INDIA bloc allies will begin without any delay. We are aware that it has to be done on a priority basis," he said, adding: "Every state has different political dynamics. We have to take all those factors into account."

Sources said the party is mulling alliances in nine states including Delhi, West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra, and UP.

Early LCA makers still await CCS pension

RAMU PATIL @Bengaluru

AFTER years of hard work by a dedicated team, the homegrown Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), Tejas took to the skies on January 4, 2001 on its maiden flight. The fighter added strength to the capabilities of the Indian Air Force (IAF) and gave a big boost to the "atmanirbhar" initiative. But those who formed the bedrock of the project at the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) are still waiting for their Central Civil Services (CCS) pension.

Since the last two decades, about 330 former ADA employees, who had joined the Agency before 2004 have been requesting the Centre for the CCS pension. ADA was set up in 1984 as an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Defence and registered under the Societies Registration Act. Those who joined ADA after 2004 come under the pension scheme like other government employees, but not those who had joined before.

About 330 had joined before 2004 after resigning or taking voluntary retirement from their parent government departments, PSUs, and autonomous bodies as they wanted to serve a major national mission mode defence programme with their specific expertise and knowledge, the ADA Retired Employees Welfare Association (AREWA) stated in a memorandum submitted to the Union Finance Minister in June 2022.

"At that time, they could not forecast the fact that the loss of their lifetime pension in exchange for CPF (provident fund) benefits would result in extreme financial hardship for their families because of the currently prevailing meager returns on investment of their CPF benefits subsequent to their retirement," the AREWA said.

CONTINUED ON: P10

> There is an absolute need for attention towards this issue, and they richly deserve it
>
> Dr Kota Harinarayana
> 'Father of LCA project'

WISHES FROM MAN WHO FLEW MAIDEN LCA FLIGHT

"From humble beginnings, we have come a long way. The development of Tejas has progressed at a very steady pace with the result that the aircraft has been inducted into the IAF and a large order has been placed. Best wishes to you all," said Wg Cdr Rajiv Kothiyal KC (Retd), the pilot who flew the maiden flight of the LCA on January 4, 2001.

India and South Africa share the Freedom Trophy after levelling the series 1-1 on Thursday | AP

India bounce back with shortest Test

GOKUL S @Chennai

INDIA and South Africa were on a new land in Newlands, literally. 642 balls. 107 overs. Four-and-a-half sessions. This is how the second Test panned out in Cape Town. As the visitors conjured a seven-wicket win to level the two-Test series, there were quite a few records too.

It is the shortest in terms of number of balls — two of the next five on the list are from 19th century. Lowest in terms of match aggregate (442) for a Test involving India and South Africa.

If Jasprit Bumrah was the star on Thursday, Mohammed Siraj and Kagiso Rabada shared the spoils on Wednesday. Apart from their bowling, this Test will be talked about for the way Newlands surface behaved. It was mischievous as batters struggled with uneven bounce. That 23 wickets fell on Day One and 10 on the next were testament to that. Rohit said as much after the match. He said there are no complaints before adding, "...as long as everyone keeps their mouth shut in India and don't talk too much about Indian pitches."

"Because you come here to challenge yourself. Yes, it is dangerous. It is challenging. When people come to India, it is again pretty challenging as well. When you are put up against a challenge like that, you come and face it. That's what happens in India, but, in India on Day One, if the pitch starts turning, people start talking about 'Puff of dust! Puff of dust!' There's so much crack here (Cape Town) on the pitch. People are not looking at that," Rohit said, adding that the match referees and ICC should keep their eyes open and be neutral.

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BUMRAH'S SPECIAL

Bumrah (6/61) ran through South Africa's middle-order in a menacing spell, bowling them out for 176. India chased 79 with seven wickets to spare

City's Mount Carmel wants university status, to go the co-ed way

PURAN CHOUDHARY @Bengaluru

MOUNT Carmel College (MCC), one of Bengaluru's historic educational institutions for women, has decided to go the co-ed way. The autonomous institution affiliated to Bengaluru City University (BCU) on Thursday said that all its programmes are now open to boys. Earlier in 2016, the college had allowed male students to apply for only postgraduate courses.

For 75 years, the institution has provided quality education to female students and secured reaccreditation of A+ Grade by NAAC. Several years ago, St Joseph's College also opened its doors to girls, leaving only a few institutions such as Jyothi Nivas PU College, Maharani Cluster University and Bishop Cotton Women's Christian College allowing enrolment for only one gender.

The co-ed decision for the academic year 2024-25 was made by the management and governing council at MCC. Dr George Lekha, Principal, MCC, told *TNIE*, "This decision has been taken by the management, as next year we want to attain university status. The council was of the opinion that we have to move past being a women's college. I believe the move is progressive, and since we have completed 75 years of our establishment, this is the appropriate next step."

The principal added that the college has also made several changes in its academic programmes and shifted its focus towards becoming a university. "We don't want to be an all-women's university. So it seemed viable that we start enrolling boys in all courses," she explained.

Dr Lekha also emphasised that there would be no drastic changes for the college, as they have not decided on increasing the intake of students. She said there would be gradual changes and the administration would have to wait and see how many applications come in for the upcoming academic year.

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75 YEARS OF SERVICE TO EDUCATION

Mount Carmel College (MCC) is one of the first women's colleges established in 1948, in Bengaluru. It has been ranked as one of the top colleges in India for women. Mount Carmel College completed its Platinum Jubilee, 75 years of service in the field of education, in 2023. With six streams and 84 programmes, the college has a unique alumna group.

WITH THIS ISSUE

CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE **INDULGE** 42 PAGES, INCLUDING 24 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

DIVE IN PARADISE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tries snorkelling during his visit to Bangaram, in Lakshadweep, on Thursday | P11

Five held for selling infant in Hassan dist

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hassan

SAKLESHPUR Rural police have arrested five persons, including an Asha worker of the Hassan district Health and Family Welfare Department, for allegedly selling a newborn baby boy in Bykaravallie of Sakleshpur taluk recently.

Hassan Superintendent of Police Mohammed Sujeetha MS said that following a complaint by Kantharaj, a member of the district child welfare committee, the Sakleshpur Rural police arrested Girija, mother of the baby; Asha worker Sumitra; Usha, the woman who purchased the baby; coffee estate owner Subramani; and estate employee Srikanth.

The SP added that Girija gave birth to a boy baby on November 15 at Hettur primary health centre in the same taluk, and sold the baby the very next day to Chikkamagaluru-based Usha, through Sumitra, who allegedly brokered the deal.

Following the tip-off, the police traced Usha to Chikkamagaluru and brought both her and the baby to Hassan on Wednesday. Later, the police handed over the baby and his mother to the mother and child care centre in Hassan.

It is learnt that Girija works at Subramani's estate, according to police, who did not reveal further details

EXPRESS READ

BBC, nine others to be charged for contempt

Bengaluru: The Karnataka High Court, on January 8, will frame contempt charges against 10 accused, including BBC (UK), Discovery and Netflix, for airing 'Wild Karnataka' or 'India's Wild Karnataka', violating the interim order passed restraining them from telecasting it. "The material on record shows that even after the interim order, the footage was in the air..." the court said. P5

Relationship with China not normal, says MEA

New Delhi: India on Thursday once again said its relationship with China is "not normal" and that both sides are engaged in diplomatic and military talks to resolve pending issues in eastern Ladakh. The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in confrontation in certain friction points in the region, even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following talks.

Land at a premium, dead travel from KR Pura to Kolar for last rites

MOHAMMED YACOOB @Bengaluru

MEMBERS of the Muslim community living in Basavanapura, Aiyappa Nagar, Swatantranagar, Vijaya Bank Colony, Seegehalli and areas surrounding KR Pura have been running from pillar to post to get a piece of land sanctioned as a burial ground.

People from the minority community living in the locality, which has a Muslim population of about 20,000, have to travel about 50km to neighbouring Kolar district to give their loved ones a decent burial, as the issue has remained unaddressed for the past 15 years. The committee members of Masjid-e-Mahmoodia in Basavanapura gave a petition to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar during the 'Government at Your Doorstep' programme on Wednesday, to look into the kabristan (burial ground) issue.

Shahbuddin Khan, secretary of the masjid, said the nearest kabristan is the Medahalli Burial Ground, and last year, the staff there had warned them not to bring any more bodies as their space was also meagre. "The burial ground is hardly 20,000 sqft and hence the committee has asked us not to bring any bodies. In case there is a death now, we have to inform masjid committees in Kolar or Hoskote to seek their permission, and then take the bodies for burial," said Khan.

He said the deputy commissioner had also written to the tahsildar on March 3, 2023, seeking suitable land, but the file has been gathering dust. Community members did a survey and found three survey numbers to help the revenue department grant a piece of land, which they would be sharing with Bengaluru East tahsildar.

CONTINUED ON: P2

AYODHYA TEMPLE

84-second muhurat set for consecration

NAMITA BAJPAI @New Delhi

THE throne for Ram Lalla is ready in Ayodhya. He will ascend the throne just past noon on January 22 with the priests having a very short window of 84 seconds to complete the consecration ceremony. For, the auspicious time that day begins at 11.51 am and ends at 12.33 pm under the *Abhijeet Muhurat* in *Mrigashira Nakshtra*. The time was set by Vedic *acharyas* in Kashi. The actual *Pran Pratishthha* (consecration) of the Ram Lalla will be between 12.29.08 pm and 12.30.32 pm that is just 84 seconds.

According to the temple trust general secretary Champat Rai, this *mool muhurat* of 84 seconds is extremely auspicious. This short time span for the *Pran Pratishthha* was chosen as 10 out of 16 qualities of this *muhurat* are good. The purification of the *mool muhurat* will be done on January 19.

Havans, rituals and recitation of the four Vedas will take place on the consecration day. The last ritual of opening eyes of the deity will be done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sources said.

The throne of Ram Lalla is three-feet high and covers eight feet on the ground floor of the temple. The throne is made of Makrana marble and is gold plated. Darshan in the current makeshift temple will be closed from January 20 to 22.

Darshan from Jan 23

Devotees will be allowed to visit the mandir from January 23, a day after consecration. Three lakh daily footfalls for darshan are expected. Suitable arrangements have been made